

“Developing your writing capabilities – Academic Skills in English”

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Formal language

- You can make your writing more formal through the vocabulary that you use. For academic writing:

Formal language

- choose formal instead of informal vocabulary. For example, 'somewhat' is more formal than 'a bit', 'insufficient' is more formal than 'not enough'.
- avoid contractions. For example, use 'did not' rather than 'didn't'.
- avoid emotional language. For example, instead of strong words such as 'wonderful' or 'terrible', use more moderate words such as 'helpful' or 'problematic'.
- instead of using absolute positives and negatives, such as 'proof' or 'wrong', use more cautious evaluations, such as 'strong evidence' or 'less convincing'.

Objective language

- Although academic writing usually requires you to be objective and impersonal (not mentioning personal feelings), often you may still have to present your opinion. For example you may need to:
 - interpret findings
 - evaluate a theory
 - develop an argument
 - critique the work of others.

Objective language

To express your point of view and still write in an objective style, you can use the following 5 strategies:

Objective language

- Move information around in the sentence to emphasise things and ideas, instead of people and feelings. For example, instead of writing ‘I believe the model is valid, based on these findings’, write ‘These findings indicate that the model is valid’.

Objective language

Avoid evaluative words that are based on non-technical judgments and feelings. For example, use 'valid' or 'did not demonstrate' instead of 'amazing' or 'disappointment'.

Objective language

- Avoid intense or emotional evaluative language. For example, instead of writing 'Parents who smoke are obviously abusing their children', write 'Secondhand smoke has some harmful effects on children's health'.

Objective language

Use modality to show caution about your views, or to allow room for others to disagree. For example, instead of writing 'I think secondhand smoke causes cancer', write

'There is evidence to support the possibility that secondhand smoke increases the risk of cancer'.

Objective language

Find authoritative sources, such as authors, researchers and theorists in books or articles, who support your point of view, and refer to them in your writing. For example, instead of writing 'Language is, in my view, clearly something social', write 'As Halliday (2018) argues, language is intrinsically social'.

Technical language

As well as using formal language, you also need to write technically. This means that you need to develop a large vocabulary for the concepts specific to the discipline or specialization you're writing for. To do this, take note of terminology used by your lecturer and tutor, as well as in your readings.

Be careful about the meaning of technical terms.

Make sure you also understand and use the key categories and relationships in your discipline, that is, the way information and ideas are organized into groups. For example, in the discipline of Law, law is separated into two types: common law and statute law. This will help you structure your writing and make it more technical and analytical.

Structuring written work

Some assignments have a standard format, such as lab reports or case studies, and these will normally be explained in your course materials. For **other** assignments, you will have to come up with your own structure.

Essays

- Essays are a very common form of academic writing. Like most of the texts you write at university, all essays have the same basic three-part structure: introduction, main body and conclusion. However, the main body can be structured in many different ways.

To write a good essay:

Essays

- know if you're expected to write an analytical, persuasive or critical essay
- clearly structure your main body and paragraphs
- use appropriate referencing
- use academic language.

Reports

- Reports generally have the same basic structure as essays, with an introduction, body and conclusion. However, the main body structure can vary widely, as the term 'report' is used for many types of texts and purposes in different disciplines.
- Find out as much as possible about what type of report is expected.

Making the structure clear

- Use the end of the introduction to show the reader what structure to expect.
- Use headings and sub-headings to clearly mark the sections (if these are acceptable for your discipline and assignment type).
- Use topic sentences at the beginning of each paragraph, to show the reader what the main idea is, and to link back to the introduction and/or headings and sub-headings.

Making the structure clear

- Show the connections between sentences. The beginning of each sentence should link back to the main idea of the paragraph or a previous sentence.
- Use conjunctions and linking words to show the structure of relationships between ideas. Examples of conjunctions include: however, similarly, in contrast, for this reason, as a result and moreover.

Conclusions

- The conclusion is closely related to the introduction and is often described as its 'mirror image'. This means that if the introduction begins with general information and ends with specific information, the conclusion moves in the opposite direction.
- The conclusion usually:

Conclusions

- begins by briefly summarising the main scope or structure of the paper
- confirms the topic that was given in the introduction. This may take the form of the aims of the paper, a thesis statement (point of view) or a research question/hypothesis and its answer/outcome.
- ends with a more general statement about how this topic relates to its context. This may take the form of an evaluation of the importance of the topic, implications for future research or a recommendation about theory or practice.

Editing and proofreading

- Depending on the type of assignment and your process of writing, editing may involve:
- removing or adding text to meet the word limit
- making your sentences clearer and more concise
- restructuring paragraphs or sections
- making sure your ideas flow logically

Editing and proofreading

- making sure you've provided enough background information
- adding in subheadings or sentences to clearly signpost the structure.

Once you've edited your work, proofread it. This involves checking spelling, grammar and references.

Evidence, plagiarism and referencing

- **Using evidence:** you need to evaluate the quality of evidence - not all pieces of evidence will be equally valuable for you to use.

You should consider:

Using evidence

- whether the evidence directly demonstrates support for a claim you are making. For example, does it show that another scholar agrees with your argument, or that results confirm your interpretation?
- the reliability of the evidence. Is it published in a peer-reviewed journal or a book by a reputable publisher? Is the author someone who has expertise and status in the field? Has the data been obtained through a rigorous methodology, using an appropriate sample?

Using evidence

- if it meets the standards for good evidence in your discipline. For example, in some disciplines, such as information technology, sources need to be quite recent, as publications that are two years old may already be out of date. In other disciplines, like Philosophy, sources that are more than 200 years old may still be authoritative and relevant.

Avoiding plagiarism

- To avoid plagiarism, you need to be aware of what falls into that category, as well as have good writing skills and referencing knowledge.

You need to be able to:

Avoiding plagiarism

- paraphrase and summarize
- know when to quote a source and when to paraphrase it
- link information from sources with your own ideas
- correctly use referencing conventions.

Planning your writing

- There are two main approaches to organizing and analyzing information for academic writing.
- The planning approach: Spend a lot of time on different types of planning before you begin writing. Only start writing when you know what you will write in each paragraph.

Planning your writing

- The drafting approach: Start writing early, while you are still developing your ideas. Write many drafts and gradually re-organise your text until your ideas are clear and your paragraphs are well structured.

Planning your writing

Both of these approaches can be successful. However, if your writing needs to be more logical, clear or analytical, focus more on your planning. Creating a good plan is a very positive early step towards writing a good assignment.

Make a task list

- a library database search and catalogue search to find relevant journal articles or books
- reading and note-taking
- brainstorming
- analyzing data
- planning the structure of your assignment
- drafting /discussion
- editing and proofreading.



Good luck!